

SHEEP RIDGE BIGHORN RAM POACHING

Information received following a rash of bighorn sheep poachings near Dubois in November 2006 resulted in the conviction of a Dubois man for his involvement with killing a ram illegally and an arrest warrant being issued for a Tennessee man alleged to have played the major role in the crime.



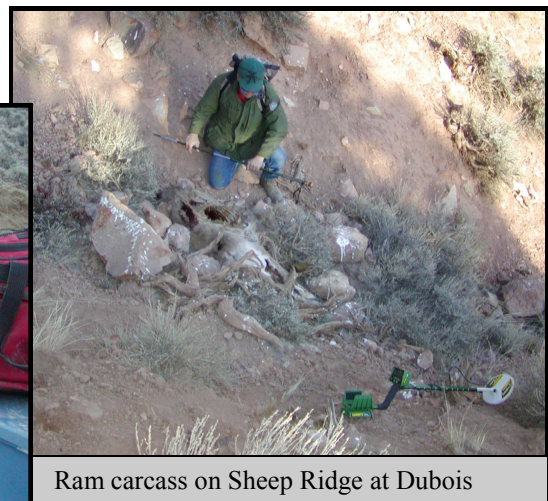
In a recent plea agreement with the Fremont County Attorney's Office, Kelly J. Grove, 22, pleaded guilty to being an accessory to taking a bighorn ram without a license and waste/abandonment of bighorn sheep. In addition, the investigation revealed Grove, who currently works on a drilling rig, was involved in the illegal take of an elk and deer. He also pleaded guilty to two counts each of waste of a big game animal and false oath to obtain resident big game licenses.

Ninth Circuit Court Judge Robert Denhardt fined Grove \$2,490, ordered him to pay \$1,500 restitution for the ram and revoked his hunting privileges for three years. In addition, he was sentenced to probation for one year, a 30-day suspended jail sentence and ordered to forfeit a .243 bolt action rifle used in the crimes.

The primary defendant in this bighorn sheep case, Roger E. McKean, 26, of Knoxville, TN did not appear for his court appearance, nor did his attorney. A warrant was issued for his arrest and he faces three charges for his role in the crime, including knowingly taking a ram out of season and without a license, waste and abandonment of a bighorn sheep and taking a bighorn sheep from a vehicle. McKean also faces five charges for violations involving an illegally killed doe mule deer and has outstanding violations on the Wind River Indian Reservation regarding two antelope that were illegally killed.

As a result of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department requesting information about four bighorns being illegally killed in area 10 of the Whiskey Mountains, a tip was received that Grove may have been involved in illegally killing a ram. On Dec. 9, 2006, Dubois Game Warden Cole Thompson and Lander Investigator Scott Browning were unable to locate Grove, but discovered blood on his pick-up truck's spare tire. The blood was later confirmed by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department laboratory to be from a bighorn ram.

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Blood evidence in pickup bed under camper

Grove was located at the Fremont County Detention Center serving a sentence on unrelated charges. The officers reported Grove was cooperative in the several interviews conducted, including when he was temporarily released from the detention center to lead the officers to the carcass. The location confirmed Grove's crime was in addition to the four poachings the officers were originally investigating.

Grove said he and McKean encountered a band of bighorn sheep on Sheep Ridge south of Dubois on Nov. 25, 2006. McKean shot a $\frac{3}{4}$ curl ram with Grove's .243 rifle and then

Grove shot it again to finish killing it. Interviews with both men determined McKean solely removed the head and hid it in nearby rocks and later Grove drove McKean back to the site to retrieve it. Neither man attempted to salvage any of the meat. McKean later took the head to Crowheart, where it was eventually recovered by officers.

"It takes 12 years of buying preference points for residents and at least 11 years for nonresidents to draw a sheep license in area 10, and the opportunity for one of these lawful hunters to legally harvest this nice ram after investing all that time and money is now lost," Thompson said. "It is sad because McKean was in the Dubois area for less than a month and admittedly didn't even know what a bighorn sheep was until moments before shooting the animal."

Grove also confessed to harvesting both an elk and deer during the season, but leaving approximately half of each animal to waste when he departed for a week-long shift on an energy drilling rig. Grove reported he and McKean also placed the spoiled meat for coyote hunting bait the day they killed the sheep.

"I believe that Kelly Grove did not want anything to do with a poached bighorn ram and is sorry for his role in the killing," Browning said. "The reduced penalties for Kelly reflect his lesser involvement and his cooperation with officers in the investigation of the ram. Kelly wanted to get this incident cleared up and behind him. I commend Kelly for doing the right thing and owning up to his mistakes."

The evidence took the investigation to the Wind River Indian Reservation, Colorado, where McKean's truck broke down after leaving Wyoming, and Tennessee, his permanent residence. "The investigation was greatly aided by wildlife officers on the reservation and both states, as well as the Fremont County Sheriff's Office," Browning said.

Grove also told officers he missed a shot at some ravens and tried to shoot the antlers off a buck deer, while on the foray with McKean. That information led to him also receiving warning tickets for attempting to take nongame wildlife and attempting to take deer without a license.